

BYZANTINE INFLUENCE IN  
THIRTEENTH-CENTURY  
ITALIAN PANEL PAINTING

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**S**INCE Ghiberti and Vasari the Byzantinizing quality of early Italian panel painting has been universally agreed to. Nevertheless, the actual influence of Byzantium on Italian art has never been sufficiently studied or defined. When specific examples of Byzantine art are adduced for comparison, they are often remote in time or made in a different medium, such as mosaic; as a result, they are only vaguely relevant to thirteenth-century Italian panels. This situation has been due less to any insularity of Italian scholars or Byzantinists than to the lack of a sizable corpus of Byzantine panel paintings—a circumstance which changed completely with the vast findings at the monastery of St. Catherine on Mount Sinai a few years ago.<sup>1</sup>

With this material we are at last able to make a number of specific observations and to draw some clear conclusions. It is possible to relate particular elements of style and subject matter in Italian panels to Byzantine panels of the same or of a slightly earlier period. In short, we are in a position to give an entirely new meaning to the old term Italo-Byzantine.

There is no question that Byzantine influence was felt in several successive stages. This is to be explained by changes which occurred in Byzantine art itself; also, it is the result of the evolution of Italian art during the course of the century. Each generation of Italian artists was interested in different artistic problems and, accordingly, absorbed different elements from Byzantine art.

This discussion is concerned with Tuscan painting of the Dugento; the works cited here are familiar ones, usually signed, or dated, or both. We have, then, much common knowledge and can speak with some assurance about the Italian examples. The Byzantine examples are, for the most part, newly discovered and still little-known icons at Mount Sinai.

We might well begin our discussion with an important Florentine work of the second quarter of the thirteenth century, the Madonna (fig. 1) in the Acton Collection, Florence, by the so-called Bigallo Master.<sup>2</sup> This painting is one of many in which the head and halo rise above the main rectangle, a formula which is mostly abandoned after the middle of the century.<sup>3</sup> It is a peculiarly Italian invention, serving to enhance the physical form of the Virgin and giving her an almost sculptured quality. This effect is also heightened by the wedges in relief on the halo—a halo which in its plastic quality emphasizes the Virgin's head. The compactness of the space and the tension between the forms and the frame yield a sense of measured volumes in the panel. The preoccupation

<sup>1</sup> A number of these icons have been published by G. and M. Sotiriou in *Icones du Mont Sinai*, 2 vols. (Athens, 1956, 1958). See also Kurt Weitzmann, "Thirteenth Century Crusader Icons on Mount Sinai," *The Art Bulletin*, XLV (1963), pp. 179–203. I wish to thank Professor Weitzmann who has been extremely generous with helpful advice; the icons in figures 4 and 5 are published here for the first time, with his kind permission.

<sup>2</sup> *Pittura italiana del duecento e trecento. Catalogo della mostra giottesca di Firenze del 1937*, ed. by G. Simibaldi and G. Brunetti (Florence, 1943), pp. 172–173 (henceforth referred to as *Mostra Giottesca*). For the oeuvre of the Bigallo Master and a brief characterization of his style, see E. B. Garrison, *Italian Romanesque Panel Painting, an Illustrated Index* (Florence, 1949), pp. 12–13.

<sup>3</sup> For this type of panel, see E. Garrison, *op. cit.*, p. 88 and illustration nos. 210–239.

with contrasting materials and textures is noteworthy, as in the dotted fabric under the Madonna's blue mantle. Time and again we will see the Italian artist play colors and textures against one another, always with the aim of generating a sense of clearly distinguished plastic forms.

It is remarkable that the throne should suggest any real volume since it is composed of layers of flat, alternating patterns, and the tipped-up seat is also to be read as the top layer in a vertical progression. Yet these decorative bands have such coherence that the throne takes on a kind of organic form. All these features, the vigorous statement of plastic forms and tightly limited spatial arrangements, are typical of Italian painting early and late.

When we turn to a consideration of Byzantine influence in such a work, an icon from Mount Sinai (fig. 2) is revealing. This panel, which in its entirety represents the Madonna with four saints,<sup>4</sup> belongs to the second half of the twelfth century. Assuredly, the two panels have strong resemblances: the Italian artist has borrowed from such a Byzantine work as this the formula of a frontal Madonna holding the Child before her as she sits rigidly on a backless throne. Even in the arrangement of the drapery the Italian is cognizant of a Byzantine formula: the way, for instance, the mantle falls down the side of the Virgin and then loops up over the knee to fall again in a zigzag between the legs. Similar too in the Italian Madonna is the gold hem around the head and neck. The pattern of lozenges forming the stars on each shoulder and above her forehead is identical. As for the schematizations of the faces, closer comparisons might be adduced, but even here there are fundamental similarities as in the hard shape of the eyebrows, the drawing of the noses, the line of light running along the noses, and the lines of light extending from the nasal wings over the cheeks.

Yet, in a number of ways the Italian and Byzantine artists express themselves very differently. In the panel from Mount Sinai the space around the Virgin is loose and free without any of the spatial tensions seen in the Italian work. It is indicative that the Byzantine artist would not have created such a densely occupied panel as the Italian. The Byzantine panel has a throne decorated with a number of herringbone shapes which recall—but only recall—definition lines on a solid object, specifically the angles of the throne legs. Byzantine art is full of remembered things but the result is often synthetic. Consequently, the throne in this panel is curiously less dynamic and space-generating than the abstractly patterned throne in the Italian panel.

Another difference between these two works is the treatment of the haloes. In the Byzantine example they are not at all decorated. It would be exceptional to see any ornament on Byzantine haloes, and in no case would the Byzantine artist give his halo the sort of sculpturesque treatment we see in the Italian painting. The Madonna panel by the Bigallo Master, who was certainly the outstanding master of Florence in his time, gives us a clear guide to the sort of Byzantine influence which we find in the second quarter of the thirteenth century. As for a measurement of the time lag between two such

<sup>4</sup> The entire panel is illustrated in G. and M. Sotiriou, *op. cit.*, 1, fig. 157.

works, it is difficult to say. While the specific Byzantine example referred to here is datable only to the second half of the twelfth century, the particular prototype known to the Bigallo Master may have been even closer in time.

In the second, third, and fourth decades of the thirteenth century, at a time when the city of Lucca enjoyed considerable importance, the most prominent artistic force was that of the Berlinghieri family. The Madonna in the Straus Collection in New York (fig. 3) by Berlinghiero, the father of the family, dates from the 1230's.<sup>5</sup> Again, one of the icons from Mount Sinai, another half-length Madonna and Child (fig. 4),<sup>6</sup> which dates from the late twelfth or early thirteenth century, is comparable in many ways.

The panel by Berlinghiero owes an enormous debt to Byzantium. This is evident not only in the general similarity of the type of the half-length Madonna, but also in the bolt upright position of the Child, the Hodegetria gesture of the Virgin, the slight inclination of her head, and the fact that the Child holds a scroll in his left hand while blessing with his right, as He tilts his head to look up at his mother. The blessing gesture of the Child is of course Western in contrast to the Byzantine manner in which his thumb joins the third finger; in the West his thumb touches both of the last two fingers. The Child's costume is the same, from the thick band around his waist to the fall of a fold of his robe over the Virgin's wrist and the skein of gold striations.

But the similarities between the Italian and the Byzantine Madonnas also extend to such details as the double gold band at the Virgin's wrist, the gold hem on her shoulder from which hang golden tassels of a sort of fleur-de-lis pattern, the gold border around her head, and even the stars made up of alternating thick and thin rays on her shoulder and head. It is interesting to note that in this instance the Italian artist does not ornament his halo so that in its plain surface it superficially resembles the Byzantine halo—but, on the other hand, Berlinghiero does not polish the gold of the halo to catch light as the Byzantine artist frequently does in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Omitted altogether by the Italian are the medallion angels so frequently found in Byzantine art. They appear infrequently in Italian art, apparently because they represented a dead end spatially since they could not be tied into the composition.<sup>7</sup>

Berlinghiero was a master of modelling; thus, beyond the particular schematizations of the Virgin's face, there is a great deal of subtlety in the modelling of the planes of the face, in the rise of the flesh, and in the faintest shadows around the lips, the nose, and the eyes. It is an awareness of the quality of skin and its lighting which we will admire in later artists and which is one of the predilections of Italian painting of all ages. In the Virgin's right hand, the careful detailing of the finger nails and the clear, delicate cylinders of the

<sup>5</sup> *Mostra Giottesca*, pp. 10–11. See also E. Garrison, *op. cit.*, p. 12.

<sup>6</sup> This exceptionally large icon, not previously published, measures 117.3 by 79.5 cm. See K. Weitzmann's paper on "Icon Painting in the Crusader Kingdom," in the present volume (p. 81 and fig. 66).

<sup>7</sup> Two exceptions are the Madonna by an assistant of Guido da Siena in the Siena Pinacoteca and the Madonna in San Verano, Peccioli (illustrated in *Mostra Giottesca*, figs. 26 and 79a), both works of the 1270's.

fingers are already distinctly Italian. Only roughly similar in this particular comparison is the Child's hair; we could, however, cite a number of other late twelfth-century Byzantine paintings with which the Berlinghiero panel is comparable in the detail of the tight, looping curls and linear treatment of the Child's hair. In our present comparison the schematizations of the faces are also only approximate.

However, if we compare the Berlinghiero Madonna to another Byzantine icon (fig. 5), a panel of the late twelfth century, also at Mount Sinai—St. Euphemius before a small bust of the Virgin,<sup>8</sup> of which we see here a detail—the similarities are striking, even though the comparison is between images of the Virgin and a white-bearded male saint. In the St. Euphemius there is an identical white light furrowing the brow, dipping in a deep "U" over the bridge of the nose. Similar too is the wing of light across the cheek and the long, thin nose ending in a point. The eyes are almost identical: long and narrow and with an elliptical pupil. The hands with their long, tapering fingers and the slight overlapping of the second and third fingers are also comparable. In all these features and in the kind of tight, linear painting, these two pictures are very close stylistically.

Returning for a moment to the Byzantine Madonna mentioned above (fig. 4), we see a kind of spiritual reserve which to the Italian way of thinking would have seemed no more than a blank stare, even though, in this instance, the Madonna is turned toward the spectator. The Italian Madonna has a more fixed look, a more directed glance, although, as it happens, in this example she glances off to the side. We are reminded that the Italian artist will usually attempt to establish a communication between his figures and the spectator, something which is almost always avoided in Byzantine art.

Berlinghiero, like his Florentine contemporary, the Bigallo Master, faithfully follows a Byzantine formula even in minute details, so that we are certain he must have had a specific prototype to guide him. That the image he produces is unmistakably and inalienably Italian cannot disguise the fact of such an influence. Berlinghiero may have been inspired by a panel of only slightly earlier date, since there are numerous examples of half-length Madonnas at Mount Sinai, most of which date from the end of the twelfth or the beginning of the thirteenth century.<sup>9</sup>

It is instructive to examine two early Italian crosses such as one by Berlinghiero in the Lucca Pinacoteca (fig. 6),<sup>10</sup> a signed work which dates about 1210-20, and one by Giunta Pisano in Santa Maria degli Angeli in Assisi (fig. 7),<sup>11</sup> also a signed work, which dates about 1235-40. A comparison of these two works not only yields an idea of Italian characteristics and the way they change from one generation to another, but also emphasizes how some of the changes are the result of a new Byzantine impetus.

<sup>8</sup> This icon, which is published here for the first time, measures 63 by 41 cm.

<sup>9</sup> See the examples in G. and M. Sotiriou, *op. cit.*, I, figs. 186, 188, 192, 200, 201.

<sup>10</sup> *Mostra Giottesca*, pp. 6-9 and E. Garrison, *op. cit.*, p. 187, no. 476.

<sup>11</sup> *Mostra Giottesca*, pp. 48-53 and E. Garrison, *op. cit.*, p. 208, no. 543.

The Berlinghiero Cross shows the open-eyed Christ Triumphant, a Western feature which is not found in Byzantine art of the preceding centuries. This, as well as the straight, stocky, and still rather Romanesque figure of Christ, tell us that this is an early Berlinghiero work. On the other hand, the Cross by Giunta shows a considerable evolution both in terms of the Italian development and in terms of Byzantine influence. Giunta, as we know, was an artistic personality of the generation after Berlinghiero, and he exerted a considerable influence on Italian painting in the 1240's, 50's, and 60's. In his crucifixes Christ is always represented dead, his head falling heavily to his shoulder. Both head and halo now are depressed to the level of the crossbar; this injects a new and more somber mood into the image. The body of Christ swings in a gentle curve to the left, a device which suggests the lifeless slump of the figure. While the principal schematizations, such as the pear-shaped abdomen, remain the same as in Berlinghiero's Cross, they are treated with a new subtlety, as in the shadows which play on the various parts of the body to suggest more fully muscle and flesh in protuberance. But if many elements in the Giunta Cross are logical and predictable in terms of the development in Italian painting between 1210 and 1240, there is also a new Byzantine influence.

A parallel among the icons of Mount Sinai is the Crucifixion (fig. 8),<sup>12</sup> a work of the late twelfth century, of which a detail is reproduced here. Just as in Giunta's Cross, the Christ is shown dead, with his head fallen to his shoulder and his body in a gentle slump. Again, the head is more nearly in line with the crossbar. In contrast to Berlinghiero, both the Byzantine artist and Giunta make the head of Christ smaller so that the proportions of the entire figure are more elongated and elegant. Even in particulars we see how close Giunta is to the Byzantine work: the loincloth has the same vertical spray of folds down the left side, the same zigzag of material between the thighs, the same rolling folds across the waist. There are differences of course. We discover that Giunta quite naturally, like Berlinghiero before him, concentrates on giving his Christ figure a dynamic corporeality, boldly emphasizing the schematizations of the body even while turning them to decorative account. The glowing haloes of the Byzantine painting are distinguished from the surrounding gold by the different surface texture, something which the Italian never imitated. Instead, both Berlinghiero and Giunta used raised ornament to emphasize the halo.

Most important is the realization that Giunta could have known a Byzantine crucifix or crucifixion scene of fairly recent date. It seems likely that the artist would have preferred a model in panel form; in any event, we no longer have to refer to much earlier representations such as the mosaic in Daphni.

An important category of thirteenth-century painting in Italy is that of a standing saint with scenes from his or her legend on either side;<sup>13</sup> the largest group, of course, is that of St. Francis. An example showing St. Catherine of

<sup>12</sup> The entire icon is illustrated in G. and M. Sotiriou, *op. cit.*, I, fig. 64.

<sup>13</sup> A number of examples can be seen together in E. Garrison, *op. cit.*, pp. 150-156.

Alexandria (fig. 9), a work of the Pisan school of the middle of the century, is typical of the genre.<sup>14</sup> The artist is a mediocre and somewhat conservative one; this is evident in the face which is more dour than serious, more concentrated than spiritualized.

A Byzantine St. Catherine (fig. 10), again an icon from Mount Sinai of the late twelfth century or early thirteenth, reveals an impressive similarity. To begin with, the formula of a standing St. Catherine surrounded by scenes from her legend draws these two works together. And, in fact, the incidence of this type of "saint panel" at Mount Sinai in the early part of the thirteenth century is of especial interest in view of the great popularity of this format in Italian painting at a slightly later point in the century.<sup>15</sup>

Beyond the general resemblance of these two paintings, there are similarities of detail. In the Byzantine example the St. Catherine stands in a rigidly frontal posture, and like her Italian counterpart holds a cross in her right hand while her left hand is raised, palm out. We see in each the imperial crown and even the same dotted white borders, simulating pearls, on costume and crown. It is remarkable how the Byzantine artist suppresses too physical a quality in the figure of the saint: the ornamental bands of her costume are entirely flat. And the flat border across the bottom of her tunic effectively reduces the sense of her weight resting on feet and of feet placed on the ground.

In many ways the panel in Pisa is typically Italian of the period. The artist expends every effort to emphasize the physical presence of the main figure: the mantle is decorated with a design of eagles in medallions while the under tunic is of distinctly lighter stuff, the folds of which tell much about the position of her thighs and legs and about her stance. At the bottom he carefully folds the material over her feet, confirming the relation between the figure and the ground plane.

The placement of the narratives is also different. In the Byzantine work the scenes continue around all four sides. This is typical, although there are examples of triptychs where the scenes are placed only on the sides. The Italian invariably restricts his narratives to the flanking sides and does not place them above.<sup>16</sup> Later, of course, the Italian will move such scenes to the bottom to form a predella. The Byzantine narratives here, and in a number of other such panels, are squeezed into a more limited space, and constitute, in fact, a border decoration. While the Byzantine sequence of scenes is usually fuller, the individual scenes are more abbreviated and tend, in general, to resemble manuscript cycles. Typically, the Italian is more spacious in his narrative compositions; the Pisan St. Catherine is no exception to this rule.

But to make a more equitable comparison between Eastern and Western narratives, two works of indisputable quality should be compared. The scene of St. Francis Healing the Cripples (fig. 11) is from an important Italian

<sup>14</sup> *Mostra Giottesca*, pp. 70–73 and E. Garrison, *op. cit.*, p. 152, no. 399.

<sup>15</sup> Several such Byzantine panels are shown in G. and M. Sotiriou, *op. cit.*, I, figs. 166–169.

<sup>16</sup> The exceptions are in most ways outside the Italian tradition and strongly Byzantinizing, as are, for example, two late thirteenth- or early fourteenth-century panels of St. Margaret and St. Nicholas in Bisceglie, Puglia (E. Garrison, *op. cit.*, p. 151, nos. 395, 396).

painting, the St. Francis altarpiece in Pescia which is dated 1235 and is signed by Bonaventura Berlinghieri, son of the Berlinghiero discussed above.<sup>17</sup> A Byzantine example is the Presentation of the Virgin in the Temple (fig. 12), a scene from an iconostasis beam of the late twelfth century at Mount Sinai. Such a confrontation, I believe, points up the fact that Italian artists did not merely imitate Byzantium in everything they did.

While the general arrangement of the entire altarpiece of St. Francis may be said to depend on a panel type borrowed from Byzantium, the elements in this scene reveal a completely Italian approach to composition in the hands of a master of considerable genius. There is the great swell and curve of the baldacchino and, at the right, the simple but elegantly decorated and spatially suggestive building. On the left we find carefully directed planar recessions from the cross-patterned cloth on the front of the altar to the altar top, to the figures behind it, and to the complexly folded light drapery behind the figures, all brought within the arc of the baldacchino. And there is the play of hands and glances which directs us from left to right across the scene. In other words, everything is done to achieve the maximum clarity in the arrangement of physical objects in relation to one another in the composition.

In the Byzantine work there is a sophisticated and complex arrangement of figures and forms; but the artist had no interest in clarifying the positions of the clustered figures at the left, or the placement of the tilting baldacchino, or the juxtaposition of the angel and the baldacchino. The Byzantine scene must be viewed as the result of a long and continuous artistic culture in which a kind of visual shorthand had become sanctioned. Bonaventura's narrative, on the other hand, must be seen as the product of a young and vigorous artistic climate which is taking a different direction. This comparison will perhaps demonstrate the fact that there were areas in which the vastly influential Byzantine sphere could not touch or affect the Italian in the thirteenth century.

Coppo di Marcovaldo is the first of the very great names in Italian art. His genius transformed the artistic formulas to which he fell heir—both Italian and Byzantine—to such an extent that it is often difficult to determine where he borrowed and where he invented. Coppo's principal contribution lay in that important area of Italian painting, the representation of the Madonna Enthroned. The Madonna that he signed and dated in Siena in 1261 already represented the new type.<sup>18</sup> His Orvieto Madonna (fig. 13) is a work of his full maturity, painted about a decade later, around 1270.<sup>19</sup> In Coppo's panels, for the first time in thirteenth-century Italian painting, the Madonna sits on a throne which has a back, thus more clearly delimiting the space around and behind the figure. In this there is a marked contrast to the formula of the first half of the century as we saw it in the Bigallo Master. In Coppo's throne the seat is at right angles to the picture plane, whereas in the earlier style of

<sup>17</sup> *Mostra Giottesca*, pp. 14–19 and figs. 5a–5f.

<sup>18</sup> Illustrated in J. Stubblebine, *Guido da Siena* (Princeton, 1964), fig. 80. For a fuller discussion of this Madonna, see *ibid.*, pp. 6–9.

<sup>19</sup> *Mostra Giottesca*, pp. 192–197.

the Bigallo Master it had been tipped up as one more vertical element. Furthermore, in the Coppo the sides of the seat recede in a slightly converging course until they are cut off by the cushions. All these things generate depth and space in the picture.

But there are other innovations. The angels no longer drift in small scale against the gold ground as in the Bigallo Master, but are brought down to a position behind the throne-back and are tangibly related to the Madonna in space, although not yet in scale. In his treatment of the figures Coppo is also more evolved than earlier Italian painters. The Child is held out to one side so that the rigid and hieratic aspect of earlier Dugento representations of the Madonna enthroned is abolished. It is the beginning of the more human relationship between figures which will so characterize later Italian art. The Madonna and Child are in contrapposto positions, the one in reverse of the other, which gives their figures great energy. The turning posture of the Child as He raises his hand in blessing and the thrust of his knee suggest considerable movement in his figure.

Looking to Byzantium for prototypes which might have influenced Coppo, we may pause once again over the half-length Madonna mentioned before in connection with Berlinghiero (fig. 4). Here, in the Byzantine example, the Child, similarly placed on the Virgin's left, glances up at her, blessing with his right hand and holding the scroll in his left. His body is wrapped in gold striated garments. Even the shape of the Child's face, the goggle eyes, the chubby cheeks, the turn of the head are similar to the representation by Coppo. The clearest difference is the relatively greater dynamism of the Child's body in Coppo's painting or, rather, the more static quality in the Byzantine figure.

While Coppo must have known such paintings as this, I believe he would have been more impressed by still another of the icons from Mount Sinai, a Madonna Enthroned with Two Angels (fig. 14), a work of the thirteenth century, probably close to mid-century.<sup>20</sup> This very small panel is one of the most accomplished of the icons at Mount Sinai and is in all probability a Constantinopolitan work. Some such composition must have influenced Coppo. Here the Madonna sits on a capacious throne with a high back in the traditional lyre shape. There is great mobility in the figure of the Madonna—more than can be found in earlier Byzantine works such as the twelfth-century Madonna panel (fig. 2) we compared to the Bigallo Master, or in mosaic representations such as those in Monreale or Trieste. Now she turns her head and also her knees toward the right. And the Child, leaning back in her lap, is turned so that He can gaze up at her while He enacts the blessing. The Virgin is swathed in robes which are heavily striated with gold lines in radiating patterns. Now these gold striations or, as it may be called, this system of chrysography, seems to be a perennial feature in Byzantine and Italo-Byzantine mosaic and painting. However, it is noteworthy that in both East and West, in Byzantine and Italian painting of the late twelfth and the first half of the thirteenth

<sup>20</sup> K. Weitzmann, "Thirteenth Century Crusader Icons," p. 186 and G. and M. Sotiriou, *op. cit.*, 2, pp. 173-174, 245.

century, this treatment of the Madonna's robe is seldom used. In the Bigallo Master and Berlinghiero, for example, the robe is dark blue and the folds are suggested by faint white high lights. Thus, the revival of the chrysographic system in Coppo reflects a similar revival in Byzantine Madonnas of the same or slightly earlier date.

Up to this point in our comparison it appears that all the major factors in Coppo's Madonna are derived from Byzantium, and, indeed, our understanding of this Italian work is enormously enhanced by comparing it to such a Byzantine work as this *Madonna Enthroned*. Nevertheless, it is just as important for us to examine the differences and to realize that even Coppo had certain immunities to things Byzantine. It is surely noteworthy that the gold striations in the Byzantine panel radiate out over every part of the composition. The footstool, the throne, its cushion, the entire costume of the angels, the Virgin, and the Child are all bedecked with these golden threads. Everything appears in a glow of golden lights—a device which effectively dematerializes this scene, giving an otherworldly atmosphere to the figures. It is typical of later thirteenth-century Byzantine painting to use chrysography in this dazzling fashion.

It is just as typical of Coppo to be chary in his use of such a device; he restricts these striations to the garments of the Madonna and Child and uses them there only to emphasize the hieratic importance of these figures. Coppo employs an astonishing variety of textures and fabrics, each of which helps to build up a composition of overlapping and juxtaposed forms. Thus the maphorium under the Child has a Courbet-like brilliance in its delicate stripes and cascading folds. The Virgin's soft, white veil, a motif introduced by Coppo,<sup>21</sup> the exuberant, leafy, French-inspired crown on the Virgin's head, the ornamental importance of the deeply grooved halo behind her head—all these contribute to the decorative variety as well as to the accretion of plastic forms in a measured space. In many of these things Coppo is an Italian, impervious to Byzantine influence. We may note, finally, that the Byzantine Madonna stares off to the right and is aloof; Coppo's Madonna is warm and human by contrast: in her face there is a mingling of quiet brooding with a gentle seeking out of the spectator. This desire to communicate is an enduring quality in Italian painting.

With Coppo we are mindful of the principle of selectivity in the borrowing from Byzantium. This is especially obvious in regard to the type of throne in his Madonna panels. Thrones with backs and thrones which are backless occur side by side in Byzantine panels and mosaics of the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries. In Italy, on the other hand, there is no example of a throne-back in panel painting before Coppo.<sup>22</sup> This artist, then, chooses prototypes which serve his purpose, and a throne with a back was for Coppo one more spatial property for his picture.

<sup>21</sup> Probably derived from a variant of the Kykkos Madonna attributed to St. Luke, one example of which is seen in the Mount Sinai icon illustrated in Sotiriou, *op. cit.*, 1, fig. 188.

<sup>22</sup> J. Stubblebine, "The Development of the Throne in Dugento Tuscan Painting," *Marsyas*, VII (1957), pp. 25-39.

To the Italianist the Byzantinisms in Coppo pale in significance beside the way he transformed everything to create his new images. On the other hand, it is quite clear that many of his innovations were actually new borrowings from Byzantium. Significantly, Coppo seems to have derived these elements from almost contemporary Byzantine examples, not from works of the beginning of the thirteenth or of the twelfth century. This is evidence, then, of the diminishing time lag in the transmittal of influences from East to West.

Cimabue, one of the giants of Italian art, is important for our discussion if only for the reason that Vasari and other writers make so much of his having been the last of those who worked in the *maniera greca*, or, as they say, of those who were "trained by Greek masters."<sup>23</sup> Probably already active in the 1260's, his career spans the long period until his death at the beginning of the fourteenth century.<sup>24</sup> His work developed out of the plastic-dramatic style of the mid-century and his predecessor, if not his teacher, must have been Coppo di Marcovaldo.

Panels by Cimabue are so few that we must depart for a moment from the theme of panel painting to examine his fresco of the Madonna with St. Francis in the lower church at Assisi (fig. 15), a work of about 1280. The grouping of figures around the throne is far more sophisticated and natural than in Coppo's work. Here at last in Italian painting the angels stand full length beside the throne, touching the finials and thoroughly adjusted to the space of the Madonna. And the throne is far more complex than those by Coppo: we have an elaborate chair made up of lathed wood parts and a double-stepped, arched footstool, with the Virgin's feet placed on different levels. Furthermore, we see the side of the throne as it recedes on a diagonal course into the depth of the picture space.

Once again, the Madonna Enthroned (fig. 14) at Mount Sinai, of the middle of the century, is a likely comparison. With it we have gauged certain Byzantinisms in Coppo; Coppo, however, had absorbed only some elements from such a work, whereas Cimabue must have been aware of or perceived entirely different things. As a reflection of the new age in which he lived it was now possible to bring the angels down into full-length position beside the throne. And Cimabue could understand the gentle and melancholy mood of these Byzantine angels; his own convey the same feeling. Similar too are the softer loops and waves of hair on the angels' heads.

The throne in the Mount Sinai panel is so synthetic a concoction that we must assume Cimabue had another kind of inspiration to guide him. For instance, in the Matthew portrait from MS 101 in the Public Library in Leningrad (fig. 16), a thirteenth-century manuscript, there is a diagonal view of the side of the lectern, and the furniture is set up on legs so that we can see the receding floor underneath. In the Matthew portrait from Burney MS 20

<sup>23</sup> G. Vasari, *Le vite de' più eccellenti pittori, scultori, ed architettori* (1568), ed. by G. Milanesi, 9 vols. (Florence, 1878-1906), I, p. 249.

<sup>24</sup> J. Stubblebine, *Guido da Siena*, pp. 6-7.

in the British Museum (fig. 17), we see lathed wood parts of the lectern. Such examples must have been known to Cimabue.<sup>25</sup> It is characteristic that Cimabue, seeking solutions to spatial and formal problems, sought Byzantine prototypes, such as the evangelist portraits, in which such properties could be found.

The Assisi fresco yields a good deal of information about Italian painting in the third quarter of the century. While the differences between Cimabue and Coppo are to a large extent a matter of the development going on in the Tuscan school, it is clear that the new generation is absorbing different things from Byzantium. One aspect of this which cannot be pursued here is the parallel between Cimabue's Crucifixion fresco in the upper church at Assisi<sup>26</sup> and the frescoes at Sopočani,<sup>27</sup> works which are not more than a decade apart and which share not only figure types and gestures but a deeply dramatic mood as well.

On the other hand, if we turn to a late work by Cimabue, his Trinità Madonna (fig. 18)<sup>28</sup> of the 1290's, we have what is, fundamentally, the most Italian picture of the Dugento. An astonishing area of the picture is given over to the architectonic throne in which, for the first time in Italian art, the artist thoroughly examines perspective recession. It is perfectly true that Cimabue takes from a work like the Mount Sinai Madonna Enthroned (fig. 14) the idea of brushing his footstool with receding gold lines, but he uses the device to mark out every dimension of his throne. The lines appear everywhere on the parts of the footstool and the sides of the throne in an elaborate system of receding and converging orthogonals, all of which taken together produce, however inaccurately, a solid, three-dimensional object which serves not only as a throne, but as a platform for the angels, and an enclosure for the prophets below. And everywhere, too, Cimabue confirms the existence together of forms and figures, as in the way the angels hold parts of the throne and the Madonna's foot bends over the edge of the footstool and is covered in a dense roll of drapery.

It is significant that in such a work we are less able to refer to comparable things in Byzantine painting. This is not only a sign of Cimabue's genius, which makes him more independent and more interpretive, but it is also a sign of the changing times. Italy in the 1290's is on the verge of throwing off the enormous and magnetic pull of Byzantium. This is seen with equal clarity when we turn to the last artist to be discussed, Duccio di Buoninsegna of Siena.

It is a very old tradition which believes Duccio is the typical example of an Italian artist under Byzantine influence. "He must," as Berenson put it, "have got his training from some Byzantine master, perhaps at Constantinople

<sup>25</sup> For the dating of these and related manuscripts, see K. Weitzmann, "Constantinopolitan Book-illumination in the Period of the Latin Conquest," *Gazette des beaux-arts*, 6th Ser., XXV (1944), pp. 199–203 and O. Demus, "Die Entstehung des Paläologenstils in der Malerei," *Berichte zum XI. Internationalen Byzantinisten-Kongress* (Munich, 1958), p. 19.

<sup>26</sup> A. Nicholson, *Cimabue, A Critical Study* (Princeton, 1932), fig. 12.

<sup>27</sup> See the illustrations in O. Demus, *op. cit.*, figs. 7–14 and V. Lazarev, *История византийской живописи*, 2 vols. (Moscow, 1947–8), figs. 266–268.

<sup>28</sup> *Mostra Giottesca*, pp. 258–265.

itself."<sup>29</sup> Actually, Duccio is more complex than that sort of hypothesis would suggest. The diminutive panel in the Siena gallery, the Madonna with Three Franciscans (fig. 19) of about 1280, undoubtedly the earliest work of his that we have, at once reveals the artist in all his variety. No other picture of that century so much prefigures the intimate and charming Madonna representations of the fourteenth century. It is the first time we find such a tender motif as the Child grasping two fingers of his mother's hand. Never have we seen such grace as in the grouping of the three monks, it is like a fan opening. Not even in Cimabue is there quite such a vigorous contrapposto as we see in the figure of the Virgin, sweeping open her mantle to enfold the worshipping figures below. It is the first example in Italian painting of an over-all patterning of the background. The arched throne is an ingenious play on space. The painting is immensely inventive, yet many influences lie behind it.

The Virgin's face, especially the nose ending in a button shape, recalls the great Madonna Coppo painted in Siena in 1261.<sup>30</sup> The wooden, lathed throne is of a type used by Cimabue in his Assisi frescoes, an example of which we have seen. Indeed, there is considerable evidence here and elsewhere that Duccio borrowed extensively from his Florentine contemporary, Cimabue. On the other hand, the patterned cloth of honor held by angels behind the Virgin in lieu of a throne-back may be compared to the decorative backgrounds in French manuscripts—an element which has a long tradition in France but which is not hitherto found in Italy.<sup>31</sup> Here, as so often again in Duccio, his awareness of artistic trends in the North is revealed.

Much in this panel also reveals an influence from Byzantium. The proportions of the Madonna with her long figure and small head, as well as the gentle, thoughtful expression on her face, recall the Madonna in the Mount Sinai icon cited several times before (fig. 14). Even the Child in this Byzantine work, unusually diminutive and alert, is similar to the Child in Duccio's panel. In one detail Duccio turns away from the Byzantine example: the only gold striations in his painting are those which deck the wings of his angels. While Duccio may have been influenced by Cimabue in the type of chair or throne, he might just as well have discovered such things independently in Byzantine manuscripts, particularly in evangelist pages where such fancy chairs and lecterns, often with openings and arches, are frequently introduced. One example of this sort of thing is found in St. Mark of MS gr. 54 in Paris (fig. 20).

The style of painting in the figures of the three monks recalls comparable figures in thirteenth-century Byzantine manuscripts, an example being the Apostle Paul in Leningrad 101 (fig. 21).<sup>32</sup> In both there is a soft and luminous quality, especially in the feathery high lights on the foreheads and noses, on the hair, and on the draperies. One is tempted to think that Duccio looked

<sup>29</sup> B. Berenson, *The Central Italian Painters of the Renaissance* (New York, 1897), p. 41.

<sup>30</sup> The face of this Madonna was repainted in the shop of Duccio, but the original physiognomy can be traced in the X-ray photograph; see C. Brandi, *Duccio* (Florence, 1951), fig. 5.

<sup>31</sup> For example, in the *Psalter of St. Louis* of about 1275; see Paris, Bibliothèque nationale, *Psautier de Saint Louis* (Paris, 1902), pls. LXXIX-LXXXVI.

<sup>32</sup> The entire page is illustrated in V. Lazarev, *op. cit.*, 2, fig. 260a.

carefully at such figures in thirteenth-century Byzantine manuscripts and that they helped to shape his new, more painterly style.

The Madonna with Three Franciscans poses rather different problems than those with which we are confronted in earlier Italian painting. Certainly there are still strong Byzantine elements, but we must also deal here with influences from his fellow Tuscans, Coppo and Cimabue. Furthermore, we are confronted with such a new element as French Gothic, an influence which will grow increasingly strong in Italy in ensuing decades. Finally, the sheer inventiveness of the artist beclouds the issue; what he achieved is usually more interesting than knowing his prototypes.

The Rucellai Madonna (fig. 22)<sup>33</sup> of 1285, one of Duccio's masterpieces and famous in its own day, struck a new note in Italian art, influencing Cimabue in his Trinita Madonna as well as Giotto's work of the early fourteenth century. It would be careless, however, to believe that it is not, despite all this, still indebted to Byzantium.

When, for instance, we look at the frame decoration (fig. 23), we find a series of bust medallions and leafy patterns which form a ribbon around the entire panel. Both elements are Byzantine, but had actually been present in earlier Italian painting: the St. Francis panel in the Bardi Chapel of Santa Croce of the mid-century is an example (fig. 24), but there neither the style of the frame ornament nor the bust portraits are as close to Duccio's as are examples in more recent Byzantine painting. In the St. Luke portrait in MS 5 in the Iviron Monastery on Mount Athos (fig. 25),<sup>34</sup> a thirteenth-century Byzantine manuscript, the leaf patterns in the border are more complex and the particular convolutions of forms are close to those in the Rucellai Madonna border. Duccio must have known such manuscripts and such new Byzantine decorative schemes.

Looking at the busts in the Rucellai Madonna frame, one finds that the figures are less close to the mid-century Italian example than they are to those in Byzantine manuscripts; as in the monks in the earlier Madonna with Three Franciscans, they are treated in a more luminous style with delicate highlights on projecting areas such as noses, brows, and fingers. This style is found in such Byzantine manuscripts as Leningrad 101 (figs. 16, 21). These comparisons again suggest that Duccio borrowed a great deal from manuscript illumination.

We might compare an angel (fig. 26) from the Rucellai Madonna with the spandrel angels (fig. 27) by Guido da Siena from his Palazzo Pubblico Madonna of about 1280. Guido was the leading Sienese artist of the generation before Duccio, and there is quite naturally a spiritual kinship between the two. The beguiling charm is the same, but the style has changed in Duccio. When, on the other hand, we compare the angel from the Rucellai Madonna with one of those in the Madonna icon from Mount Sinai which we have seen before (fig. 28), we find a comparable Hellenic look in the softly falling hair and the proud

<sup>33</sup> *Mostra Giottesca*, pp. 105–113.

<sup>34</sup> For a photograph of the entire page, see pl. 35 of the portfolio *Evangiles avec miniatures du monastère d'Iviron au Mont Athos* issued by G. Tsimas and P. Papahadzidakis, Athens.

carriage of the head. This, then, is the sort of Byzantine panel which would have influenced Duccio, and which helps to explain the gulf between Guido and Duccio. Guido had, of course, absorbed an earlier style from Byzantium, whereas Duccio typically takes up the newer style developing in Constantinople during the later thirteenth century, one aspect of which is this Hellenic quality seen in the angel from the Mount Sinai panel. Or, in a detail of the fine Moses, another icon at Mount Sinai (fig. 29),<sup>35</sup> probably of the first half of the thirteenth century, we see the same smooth planes of the face, with simplified schematizations, with the long eye and the almond-shaped iris, and the way of painting the hair in several tonalities which yields a softer and more natural texture. It is just these stylistic characteristics which are to be found in the angels of Duccio's Rucellai Madonna.

Duccio, working at the end of the thirteenth century and the beginning of the fourteenth, is a more cosmopolitan artist than earlier Italians. While he is, as we see, still profoundly influenced by Byzantium, it cannot be denied that he also turned to the Gothic North. Certainly, the most conspicuous new factor in the Rucellai Madonna is the influence of France. It has been suggested that the composition of this picture indicates Duccio knew the window at Chartres called *la belle verrière* where angels are similarly disposed around the throne of the Virgin.<sup>36</sup> The little Gothic fenestrations on the throne are surely French in origin. The charming motif of the Virgin touching the knee of the Child probably also comes from the North, being found in French sculpture at an earlier time. The warmth and charm of the figures, the pale, tinted colors, the whole airy grace of the picture suggest the suave qualities of thirteenth-century French sculpture, with which Duccio must have been familiar. In a way, the Rucellai Madonna is a turning point: despite the strong influence from Byzantium which we see in this picture, it marks the end of Constantinople's exclusive domination of Italian painting.

From all of the foregoing, it is clear that Italian painting of the thirteenth century was in varying degrees dependent on Byzantine models—borrowing spatial, iconographic, and emotional motifs as they could be absorbed. Byzantine elements of the early part of the century were of less significance in the later part of the century. In the early decades the Italian artist was well content to imitate the bold and hieratic images of Byzantium, but after the middle of the century artists such as Coppo and Cimabue looked for something different—they were interested in solving figural and spatial problems and they consequently sought different things in Byzantine painting. Duccio, at the end of the century, wanted a more painterly style and a warmer emotional atmosphere, and these things he was indeed able to find in the newer Byzantine painting of the time. Thus, we see that the time lag between the Byzantine prototype and the Italian work is shorter than we have previously believed. In any case, we will not be able any longer to characterize the Italo-Byzantine school with references, say, to the twelfth-century mosaics of Sicily.

<sup>35</sup> For an illustration of the entire icon, see G. and M. Sotiriou, *op. cit.*, 1, fig. 75.

<sup>36</sup> E. DeWald, *Italian Painting, 1200-1600* (New York, 1961), p. 106 and fig. 5.2.

What may not have emerged so clearly is the fact that Byzantine influence is more easily transmitted when it is in the same medium. Both style and subject matter vary considerably from panel painting to manuscript illumination to mosaic and fresco. Thus, Berlinghiero's half-length Madonna can be understood only in terms of comparable Byzantine panels. So thoroughgoing an influence could scarcely have been obtained from a mosaic, a manuscript, or an ivory. The exceptions may have been Duccio and also Cimabue, both of whom seem to have borrowed from manuscripts. We are confronted, therefore, with the problem of whether large numbers of Byzantine panels found their way to Italy, and, if so, of what has happened to them—the few examples in Italian museums published by Lazarev all turn out to be fourteenth-century icons.<sup>37</sup> As to the possibility that artists came to the West from Constantinople, evidence is lacking.<sup>38</sup> However, even if we do not yet understand how the influence of Byzantium was effectuated, we are able to see the nature of this influence with considerable clarity and to gauge the changes from period to period in the thirteenth century.

<sup>37</sup> V. Lazarev, "Duccio and Thirteenth Century Greek Icons," *Burlington Magazine*, LIX (1931), pp. 154–169.

<sup>38</sup> Two exceptions are the Madonnas in the National Gallery, Washington, which came from the Andrew Mellon Collection (no. 1) and the Otto H. Kahn Collection (no. 1048) and both of which were once in Calahorra, Spain. Otto Demus has convincingly attributed them to the school of Constantinople of the later thirteenth century (*op. cit.*, pp. 40–41, 54–55). The panels contain so many Italianisms that I believe their Byzantine author must have executed them in the West. A more complete study of this problem will appear in *The Art Bulletin* for September 1966.



2. Mount Sinai. Byzantine Master, Madonna with Four Saints, detail



1. Florence, Acton Collection. Bigallo Master, Madonna Enthroned

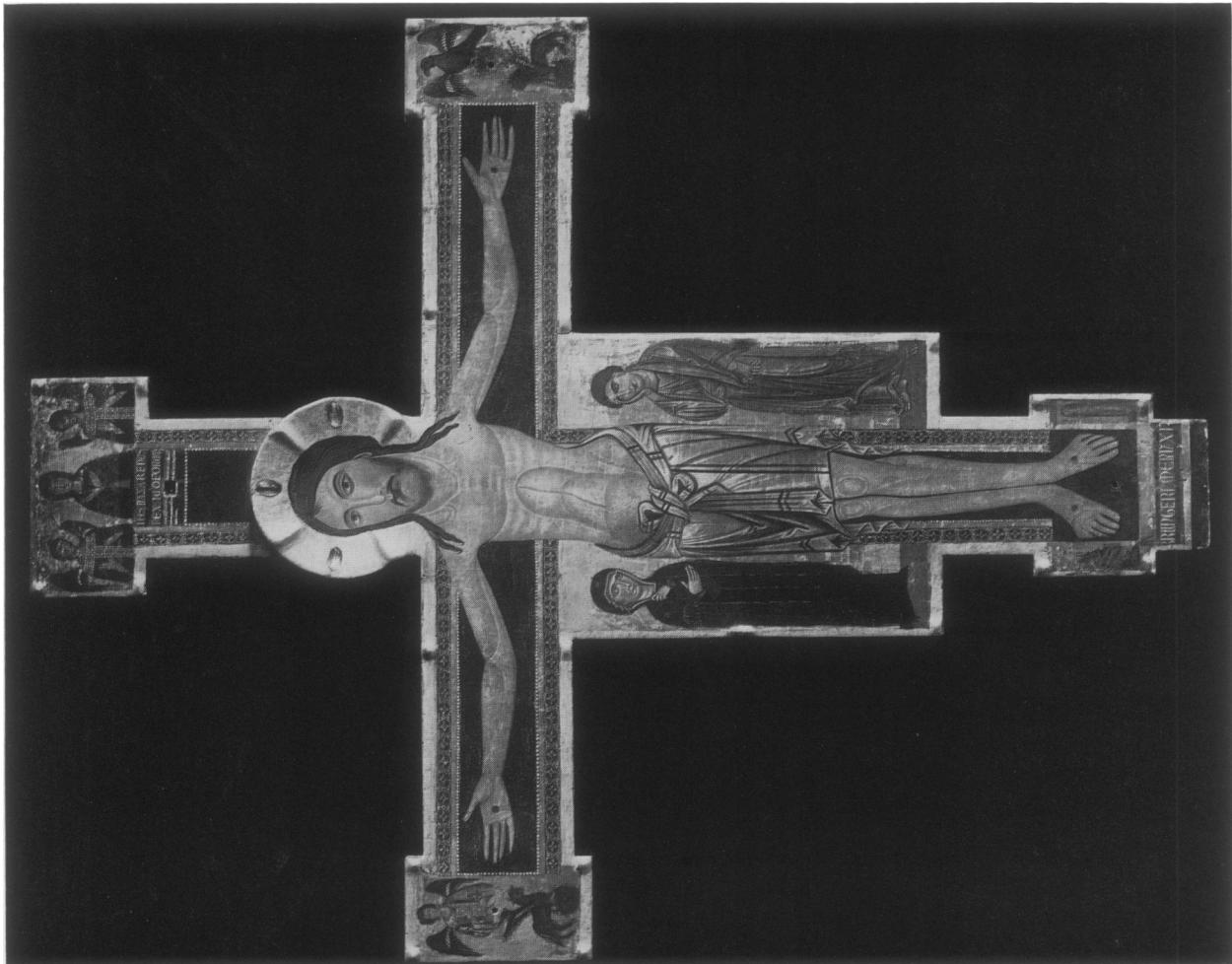


3. New York, Straus Collection. Berlinghiero, Madonna and Child

4. Mount Sinai. Byzantine Master, Madonna and Child



6. Lucca, Pinacoteca. Berlinghiero. Crucifix

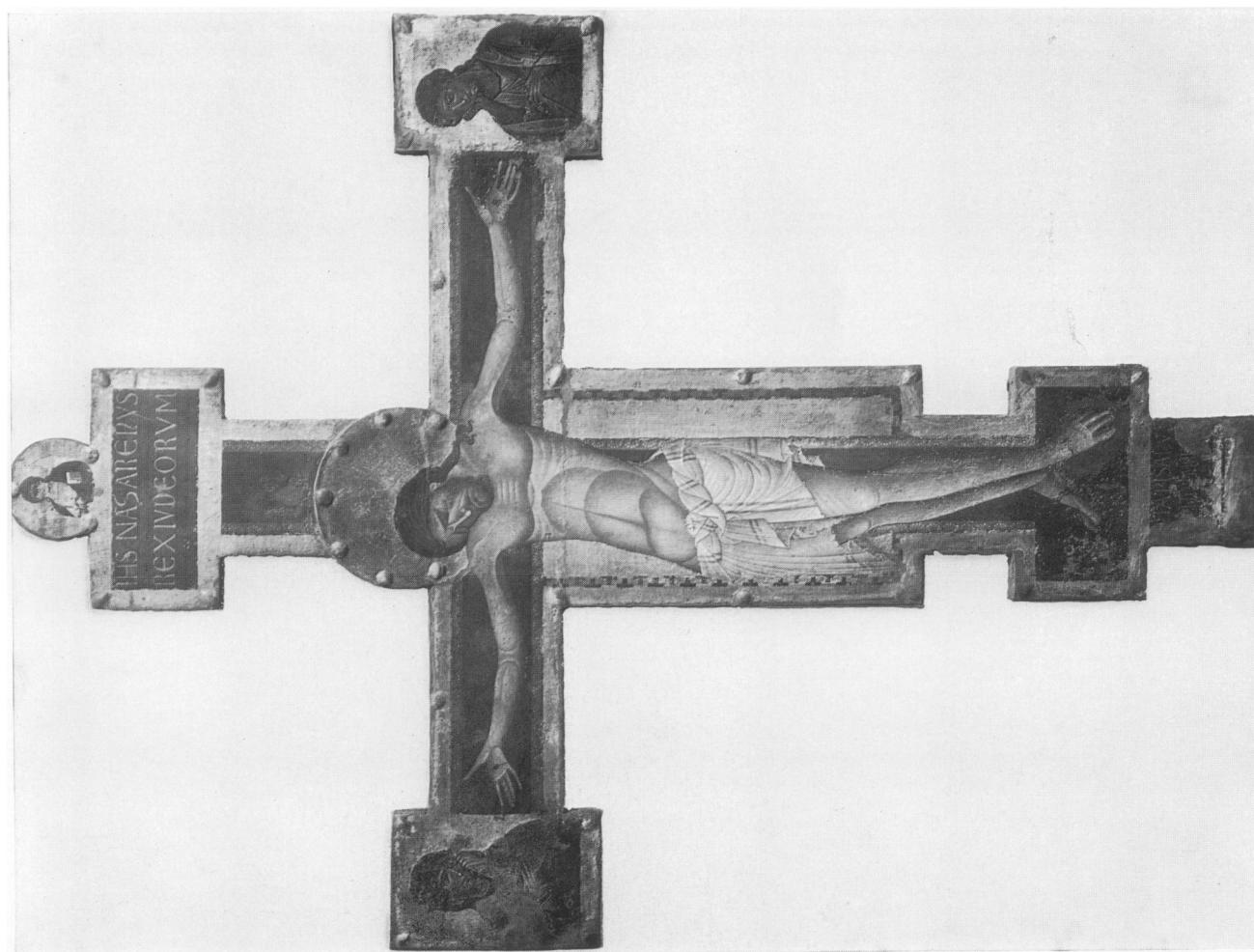


5. Mount Sinai. Byzantine Master. St. Euphemius before the Virgin, detail

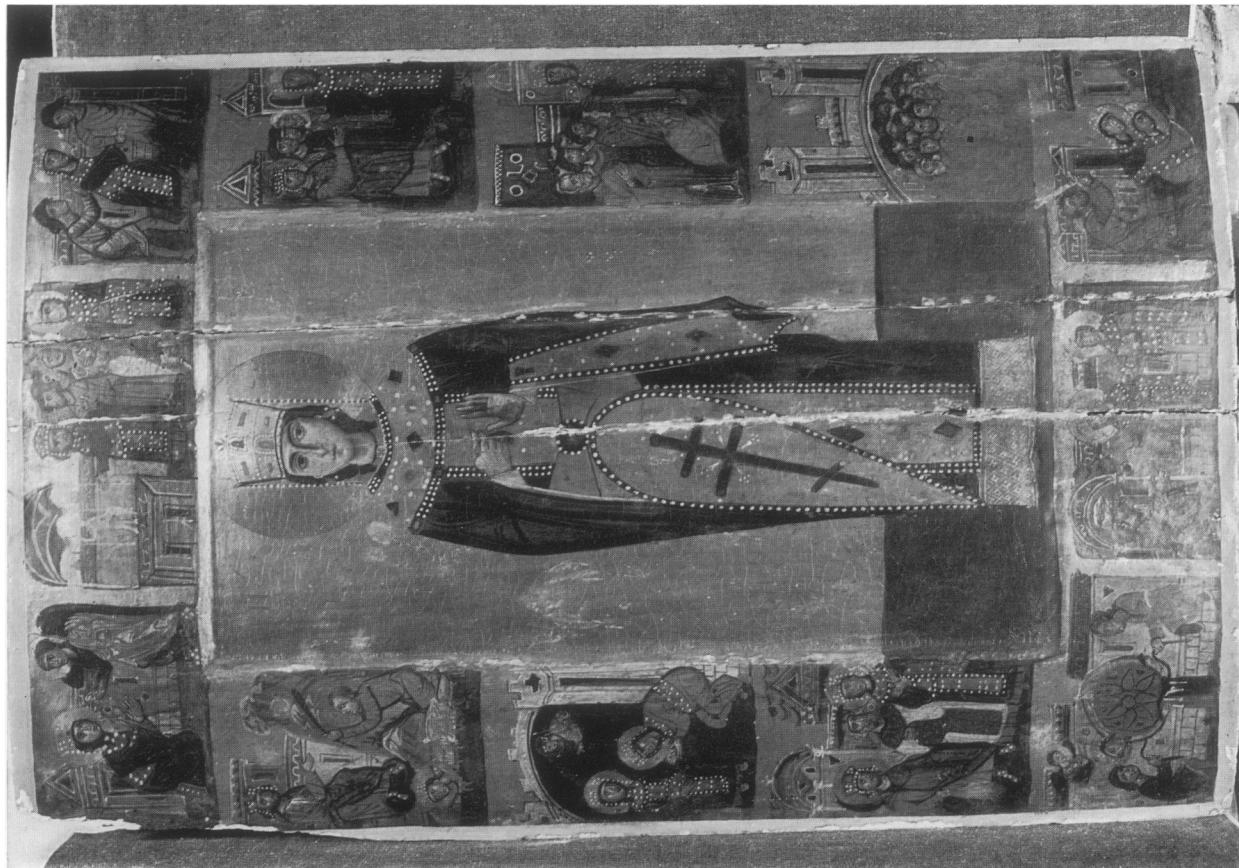




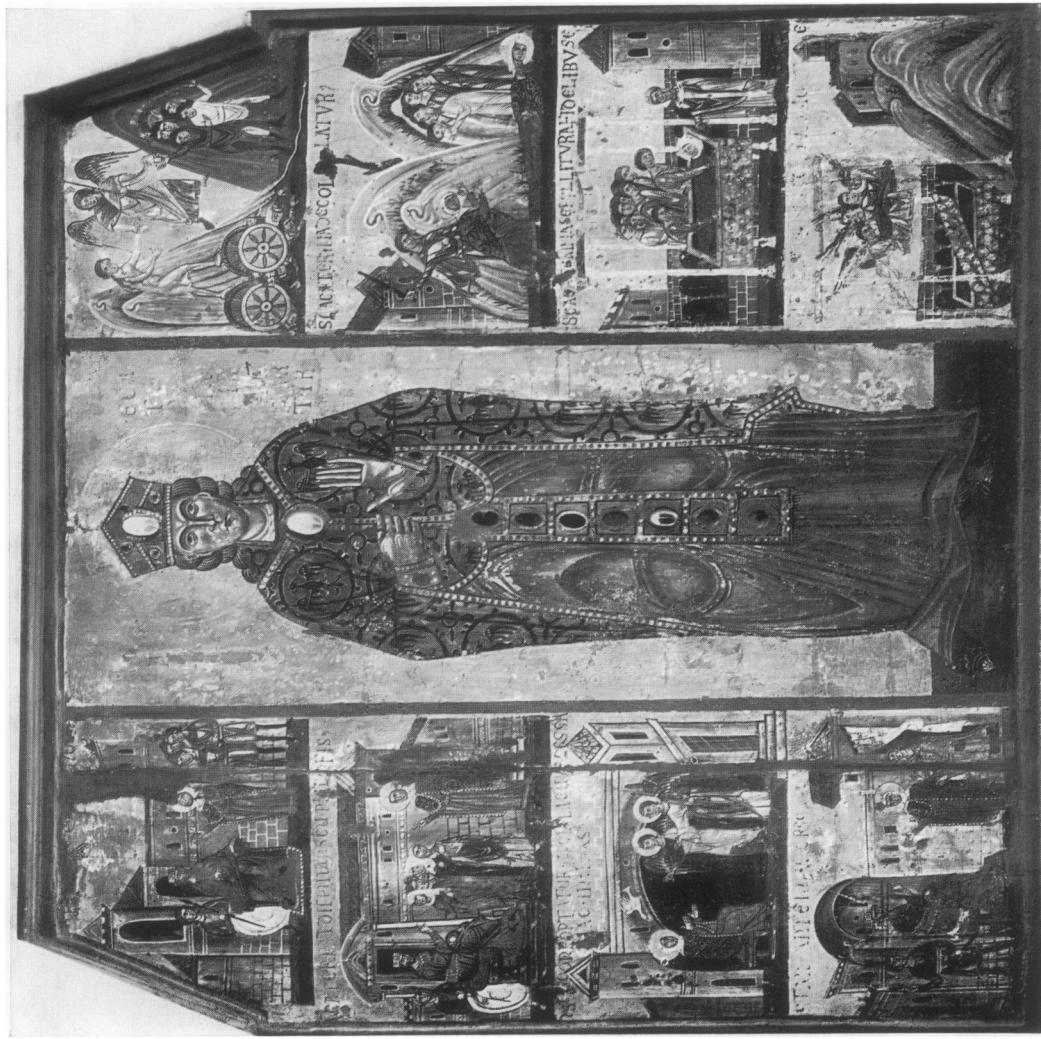
8. Mount Sinai. Byzantine Master, Crucifixion, detail



7. Assisi, Santa Maria degli Angeli. Giunta, Crucifix



10. Mount Sinai. Byzantine Master, St. Catherine with Scenes from Her Legend



9. Pisa, Museo Nazionale di San Matteo. Pisan Master, St. Catherine with Scenes from Her Legend



12. Mount Sinai. Byzantine Master, Presentation of the Virgin in the Temple



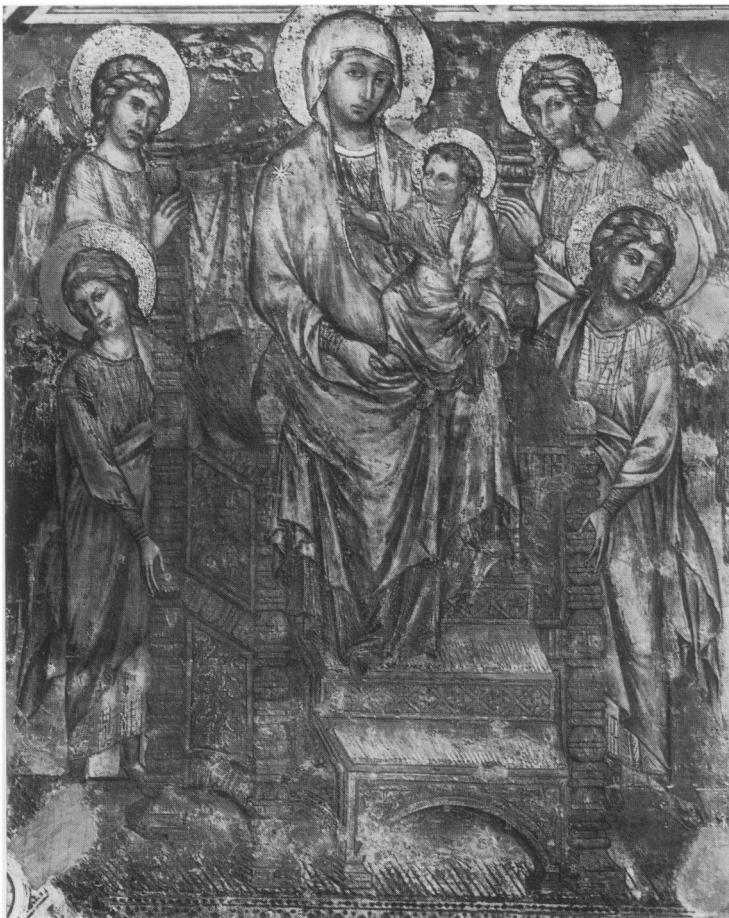
11. Pescia, San Francesco. Bonaventura Berlinghieri, Altarpiece, detail,  
St. Francis Healing the Cripples

13. Orvieto, Santa Maria dei Servi. Cappella di Marcovaldo,  
Madonna Enthroned



14. Mount Sinai. Byzantine Master, Madonna Enthroned





15. Assisi, Lower Church. Cimabue, Fresco, detail,  
Madonna with St. Francis



16. Leningrad, Public Library. MS 101,  
Byzantine Master, detail, St. Matthew



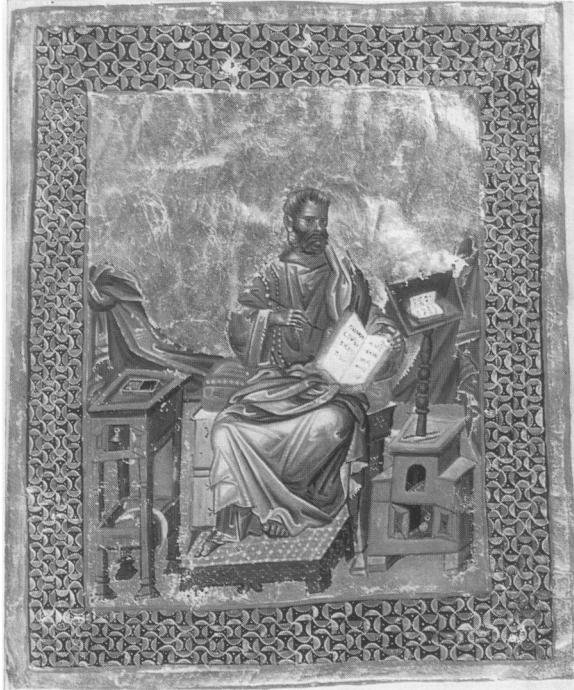
17. London, British Museum. MS Burney 20,  
Byzantine Master, detail, St. Matthew



19. Siena, Pinacoteca. Duccio, Madonna with Three Franciscans



18. Florence, Uffizi. Cimabue, Trinita Madonna



20. Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale. MS gr. 54,  
Byzantine Master, St. Mark



21. Leningrad, Public Library. MS 101,  
Byzantine Master, Apostle Paul, detail



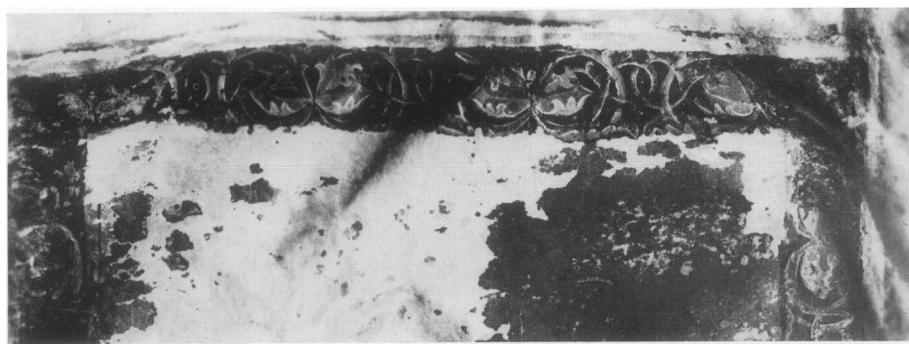
22. Florence, Uffizi. Duccio, Rucellai Madonna



23. Florence, Uffizi. Duccio, Rucellai  
Madonna, detail of Frame



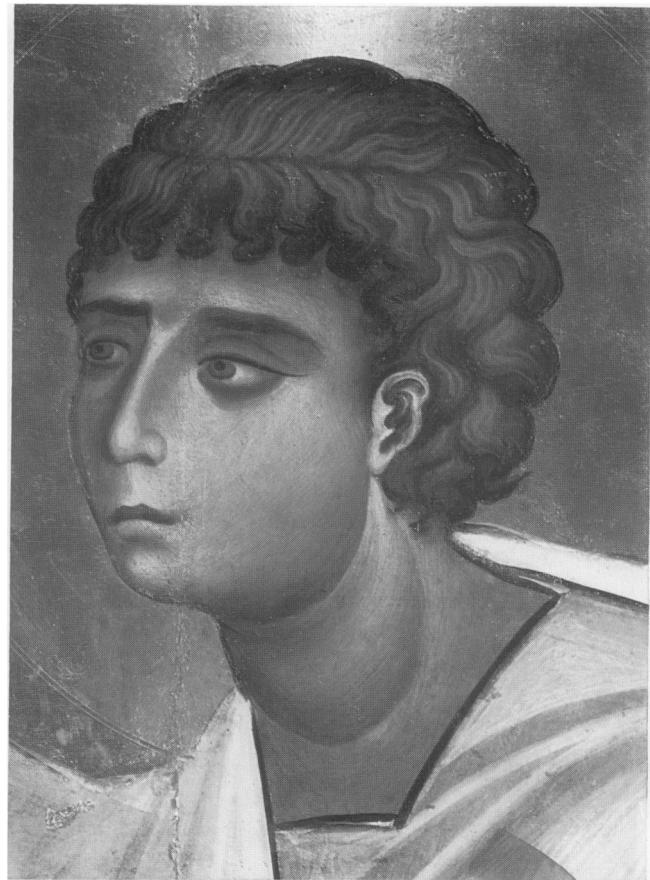
24. Florence, Santa Croce. Bardi St. Francis Master,  
detail of Altarpiece



25. Mount Athos, Iviron Monastery. MS 5, Byzantine Master, St. Luke,  
detail of Border Decoration



26. Florence, Uffizi. Duccio, Rucellai Madonna,  
detail of Angel



29. Mount Sinai. Byzantine Master, Moses, detail



27. Siena, Palazzo Pubblico. Guido da Siena,  
Angels from Madonna Enthroned



28. Detail of Figure 14, Byzantine  
Master, Angel